



Advocacy

Part of the Staff Development Process?

ISSUE ORIENTED

During my years at ISTE, I have read many articles and attended many conference sessions about wonderful technology projects that have made a difference for students and teachers. So often the grant-, EETT-, or bond-supported project ends with wonderful results achieved and continued good uses, but no building on the experience or scaling it up because the funding ended. With funds already tight, schools and districts need to think about advocating for increased funding in general and for their technology needs in particular.

How can schools and districts start or become better advocates for increased or even adequate funding? ISTE's recent advocacy efforts have resulted in a documented process and an online toolkit for educators. (See Jennifer Roland's article on p. 10.)

We now have a body of knowledge around what advocacy is and how to go about it, and through technology, we have tools to make it happen. But how can it become systemic throughout a school or district? Perhaps learning how to be an advocate and developing the stories, facts, and data to support advocacy efforts should be a part of staff development around any technology project.

We know that staff development is a crucial part of any effort to use technology to improve learning for students. You can't just give out equipment and electronic resources without educating recipients about their use and how to integrate them into curriculum based on what we currently know about how people learn.

Usually the project directors or district personnel and evaluators collect data from surveys,

interviews, evaluation rubrics for final projects, and test or quiz results. But think how powerful it could be if a component of the project was to teach each individual teacher how to assess what is necessary to improve learning for students and how to become an advocate for those practices and the funding needed to implement and grow them? And then what if they included time to strategize about how to use the current source of funds to scale up the project? You could develop individual capacity for advocacy as well as channel that capacity into funding efforts. You can use effective results to develop stories and data to use in applying for grants, or better yet, for arguing for additional funding in the school or district budget.

One component of many projects is to teach educators first how to do their own action research to determine effective teaching practice and then how to collect their own data to justify their conclusions. This action research can send a powerful message to administrators, school boards, PTOs, funding agencies/organizations, and legislators. If digital storytelling is also a component of staff development, teachers can develop digital stories around their own successful practice and provide good evidence for advocacy efforts.

Districts who get their advocacy message developed have a powerful spokesperson in their superintendent. Hilary Goldmann, ISTE's director of government affairs, reports that legislators listen very hard indeed when superintendents call with a list of their issues. District or school staff development programs may just be the venue for developing your message to secure district, state, federal, or grant funding.

By Anita McAnear

Anita McAnear is L&L's acquisitions editor and national program chair for NECC. A former middle school math and language arts teacher, McAnear has been with ISTE since 1983.